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“WHO IS FEEBLE-MINDED?”¹

SAMUEL C. KOHS.²

(This article continues the discussion of the suitability of psychological tests begun in the last number, as tools for the criminological laboratory in the courts.—ED.)

Clinicians generally are inclined to ignore attacks upon their methods, attacks which are based on insecure foundations or seem impregnated with prejudice. Yet this restraint occasionally cannot be kept within bounds when the attack is adapted, consciously or unconsciously, to prejudice and lead the general public astray. Our ultimate appeal in all this work is to public opinion, and we can hardly afford to sacrifice the normal progress of applied psychology, in this field especially, because of some remediable and inconsequent defect in our procedure, a defect which is often magnified entirely out of proportion.

But coming more specifically to the paper under the above title in the January number of this JOURNAL, the careful reader will find it shot through with such fundamental errors that the whole thesis is invalidated and thrown out of court. And it is entirely too bad that this unfounded criticism should have been given such country-wide publicity. For purposes of clarity we will consider the above-mentioned errors one by one.

1. A particular object of recurrent attack in Wallin's paper is Goddard's 1911 revision of the Binet Scale. But the 1911 scale as the author of that article uses it and as he speaks of it is a matter of history. (He is referred particularly to the article by Goddard in the Training School Bulletin for April, 1913, on "The Standard Method for Giving the Binet Test," especially regarding the question of tests beyond age 12). How can he expect to obtain comparable results when he uses a tool which is being applied by others in a much improved form?

¹See article under this title in the January, 1916, number of this JOURNAL. The author of that article, Dr. Wallin will make a brief statement further in reference to this subject in the next number.

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2. We will assume, in absolute fairness to the viewpoint of Dr. Wallin, that in attempting to demonstrate the sheer nonsense of using the higher ages of the scale for diagnostic purposes, he did not so select his cases as inevitably to prove his point. Nevertheless, his choice is open to severe attack. He compares one group whose members are respectively (note sex and age): male 65, female 59, male 37, male 42, male 43, male 41, (5 males, 1 female), with another group whose members are: female 17, female 19, female 19, female 18, female 27, male 17, (1 male, 5 females). In order to feel warranted in making a comparison to demonstrate the influence of school training on the Binet Scale he must have assumed that all variables in both groups, except school training, were equal and constant, an assumption very glaring in its fallibility. For one need only glance over the ages cited in order to discover a most prominent source of error. Led as he is into any number of statistical pitfalls through his unfortunate choice of cases, one may justly grow suspicious not of one, but of all of his conclusions.

3. His assumptions and declarations as to what Binet testers would say and do are entirely erroneous and are likely to give a decidedly false impression. It is truly comforting to know that there are still some Binet testers left who have preserved their sanity, whose scientific perspicacity and caution have really suffered no impairment. Wallin has magnified enormously out of proportion a group of distinctly harmful examiners, and as a result, the number of those doing valuable, sane, practical work has shrunk correspondingly. The final perspective is entirely misleading and unjust. And a news-reporter eager for the sensational, finds here sufficient sanction for a title-heading in our next morning's paper reading: "mind tests fail," "Binet-Simon Method unscientific, misleading, utterly unreliable and based on 'untenable standards.'" (See American papers for December 28, 29, 1915.)

It is well to remember in this connection that as yet we have not developed a single measuring instrument which may at all be regarded as "fool-proof," and the Binet scale is no exception to this. This instrument, like so many others, is bound to fall into the hands of the careless and the untrained. What perversion of the facts for the critic to place all mental testers, with perhaps the exception of one or two, in the same category with the the inexperienced, the poorest amateur.

4. As incorrect as Wallin may have been in not using the up-to-date Vineland revision, it is of interest to compare his Binet find-

ings, detached from his own unconsciously misleading remarks, with ours obtained from the examination of 335 consecutive cases in the Chicago House of Correction. (For a detailed report see Bulletin No. 3, "The Practicability of the Binet Scale and the Question of the Borderline Case." Copy sent free on request). Although some may object that our results were obtained from a highly selected group, an objection which we second, nevertheless, in view of the fact that other students now experimenting with groups very much different from ours have arrived at almost the same conclusions regarding the lower limen of borderlinity, this condition need not disturb us. We found 10^3 to be the lower limit of borderlinity. No cases testing 10^3 or below were found to be normal, a large number of supplementary tests having been used in all cases. (All subjects were between 17 and 21 years, chronologically). Of those testing over 10^3 the following were the probabilities regarding the incidence of normality:

Of those testing 10^4 , 1 was normal to 6 who were feeble-minded.
 Of those testing 11^0 , 1 was normal to 1 who was feeble-minded.
 Of those testing 11^1 , 1 was normal to 1 who was feeble-minded.
 Of those testing 11^2 , 4 were normal to 1 who was feeble-minded.
 All those testing 11^3 or over were found to possess normal intelligence.

Wallin's findings were as follows:

Mr. A.....65 years of age, tested 10^3 .
 Mrs. B.....59 years of age, tested 10^3 .
 Mr. C.....37 years of age, tested 11^1 .
 Mr. D.....42 years of age, tested 11^1 .
 Mr. E.....43 years of age, tested 11^2 .
 Mr. F.....41 years of age, tested 10^4 .

Miss H.....17 years of age, tested 12^4 .
 Miss I.....19 years of age, tested 12^3 .
 Miss J.....19 years of age, tested 13^2 .
 Miss K.....18 years of age, tested 12^2 .
 Miss L.....27 years of age, tested 12^4 .
 Mr. M.....17 years of age, tested 12^4 .

Of his twelve cases:

2 tested 10^3 , (ages 65, 59), (feeble-minded, if considered of the same type as the members of the above-mentioned selected group);
 1 tested 10^4 , (age 41), (1 chance out of 7 that he was normal); 2 test-

ed 11¹, (ages 37, 42), (1 chance out of 2 that they were normal); 1 tested 11², (age 43), (4 chances out of 5 that he was normal.)

The college and High School group tested between 12² and 13², unquestionably normal, in the light of our findings. It makes one smile to observe that his two oldest cases aged 65 and 59, tested 10³. Of course, if their ages were 19 and 17 and they tested 10³, a totally different story would undoubtedly have to be told. The reader of Dr. Wallin's paper must not be misled into believing that Binet testers assume, as he has erroneously done, that a result such as 10³ at age 65 is equivalent to 10³ at age 19. A seriously false impression by the assumption that no allowance is ever made for mental decline. Examined "45 or 50 years ago" it is highly probable that both would have obtained much higher ratings. No competent Binet examiner would call Mr. A (65 years old) and Mrs. B. (59 years old) feeble-minded in view of all their previous history. I do not know one case where that has been done, nor one case in which a "successful business man" has been adjudged a "hopeless imbecile" and his "segregation or colonization requested."

5. Wallin seems to have lost sight of the fact that at the border line both groups, normal and feeble-minded, overlap. A subject testing 11¹ may be normal or may be feeble-minded, depending on a large amount of other evidence. In his "School Training of Defective Children,"³ Goddard says:

"Nothing has yet offered itself that is as satisfactory as the Binet-Simon Measuring Scale of Intelligence. Nothing else is needed in the great mass of cases than this test, and we can rely absolutely upon it,—unless we should discover children whose actual accomplishment contradicts the results of this test. I know of no such cases as yet In cases where the test shows the child to be from two to three years backward, we have what we call the borderline case, and then it is desirable to supplement these tests by others at least, to make us feel that our diagnosis is safe." p. 6.

On the subject of overlapping, Wallin is referred to p. 127 ff. of E. L. Thorndike's, "An Introduction to the Theory of Mental and Social Measurements," Teachers' College, Columbia University, N.Y., 1913, 277 p., and to chapters 11 and 17 in William Stern's "Die differentielle Psychologie in ihren methodologischen Grundlagen," Leipzig: Barth, 1911, 503 p.

³Yonkers-on-Hudson, N. Y.: World Book Co., 1914, 97 p. School Efficiency Series: Hanus.)

One who is familiar with the subject matter of these references, together with the conclusions both authors have drawn, and the cautions they both have advised, it is impossible to understand many of Wallin's opinions, made seemingly in entire ignorance of Thorndike's and Stern's discussions.

6. The arbitrary standard which he sets is not applied in any laboratory making claims at cautious, accurate, scientific work. I do not know of any of the cases referred to by Dr. Wallin of men who were declared feeble-minded, notwithstanding that they were, to use Wallin's terms, "intelligent," "eminently successful and prudent in the management of their affairs," "law-abiding, respectable and successful," and consequently I am not able to discuss them.

7. By using the intelligence quotient in all of his cases, the author shows how facts have been unconsciously distorted in order to hammer home a doubtful point. First of all, the intelligence quotient is not at all as generally used as one would be led to suspect. Secondly, those who do use it confine themselves to the lower ages, and not as Wallin has done, to advanced ages such as 65.^{3a}

It would also be well at this juncture to give the reader the exact words of William Stern, the authority who is responsible for the introduction of the mental or intelligence quotient.⁴ (Intelligence quotient is the result obtained by dividing the mental age of a subject by his chronological age):

"The quotient does not seem, however, to afford an actually constant expression of degree of feeble-mindedness, but shows a tendency to fall in value as age increases. This tendency, it is evident, is but slight within the limits of age that have been mentioned, "(8-13 years chronologically). . . . "*From these considerations it follows that the mental quotient can hold good as an index of feeble-mindedness only during that period when the development of the feeble-minded individual is still in progress.*" (Certainly not later than age 13). (*Italics mine.*)

One wonders why the intelligence quotient was used beyond this definitely specified age.

3a. An article by Dr. Kuhlman which has just come to hand; ("What constitutes Feeble-Mindedness," reprinted from *Journal of Psycho-Asthenics*, Vol. XIX, No. 4, June 1915, pages 214-236), contains the following statement:

"For 350 consecutive examinations with my revision of the Binet Simon tests at the Minnesota school for Feeble-Minded I found the following distribution in number of cases belonging to the different intelligence quotients:" etc.

"In obtaining these figures it was assumed that development of intelligence stops at the age of fifteen, so *the mental age was never divided by more than fifteen for the age*" p. 230 (*Italics mine.*)

"Psychological Methods of Testing Intelligence;" Baltimore: Warwick and York, 1914, 160 p.—G. M. Whipple, translator.

Dr. Terman of Leland Stanford University who has recently made efforts at determining the level of intelligence possessed by average uneducated adult men and women, used 16 years as the highest chronological age in estimating the mental quotient. This is certainly as high as anyone dare go, since we have as yet no series of tests which measures mental development much beyond this age.

8. Competent psychologists and properly trained Binet testers should be trusted in their diagnoses. As a group we are not as careless, as conscienceless, as wildly extreme as some may imagine, and one may be certain that our cautious conservatism leads us rather to call many cases normal, who in reality are feeble-minded, than the reverse. The subject is always given the benefit of the doubt.

9. One is quite amazed to find Wallin concluding his paper with the affirmation that individuals who have "stagnated on the X—, XI—, XII—year mental level" are not to be considered feeble-minded, and that the burden of proof is on the affirmative. Case history after case history has been written by various authors describing individuals who tested 10 or over, individuals who are feeble-minded without the least possibility of doubt. I take this opportunity of acquainting the reader with some of the cases which Dr. Wallin must have overlooked. Here are three taken from Huey's "Backward and Feeble-minded Children."⁵

"DORA M., AGE TWENTY-TWO YEARS. In her neat uniform Dora is often taken for a steady-going attendant. She is a good example of the way in which many of the more stable higher-grade children may grow into the service of the institution. Unfortunately, her stability disappears in the presence of the opposite sex, and her dullness is evident whenever her routine of life is varied." p. 58. . . . "*The Binet tests give Dora a mental age of 10½ years.*" p. 59. (*Italics mine*). After nine years of observation at Lincoln, Huey felt justified in stating that "She will probably never have an appreciably better mind." p. 59. . . . "On the ward Dora is a trusted and useful helper in the storeroom, caring for the children's clothing, helping to wash and iron the finer things, waiting on table and having the privilege, for the latter service, of wearing a special uniform. She is talkative and lively, but gets disgusted and angry by times and then pouts and says she 'has the blues.' Her sewing teacher reports that Dora does not always act normally in the expression of her feelings, and that occasionally she breaks out laughing without apparent cause. . . . Generally she is

⁵Baltimore: Warwick and York, 1912, 221 p.

satisfied and contented, and in the very simple conditions of her work and life she conducts herself normally and correctly. But the tests show a fatal weakness of mental control, tendencies to confusion, to 'losing her head' whenever circumstances are a little complex, or under strain and stress. With her instincts well developed we should expect to find just what general observation shows, a girl who is emotionally unstable, at the mercy of her sexual instinct, absurdly over-conscious of herself in the presence of men and having to be watched carefully when the latter are about. She was taken out of the institution and cared for in a family for a while. But this instability made it necessary to return her to the institution for safety. Even here she gets into 'disgrace as the result of flirting.' . . . Here is a striking instance of a useful and comparatively happy life being realized in an institution, by suiting the conditions of environment, work, and stress to the girl's mental level, in the case of a girl who if she lived at large would certainly be a menace to society and to herself." p. 60-61.

According to Wallin's arbitrary ten-year standard she would be considered normal and consequently *forced* to be at large.

"WENDY J., AGE TWENTY YEARS. Wendy, now a rather pretty girl of 20, came to the institution 11 years ago. Nothing is known of her family or personal history except that when admitted there were stated to be two brothers and a sister alive and mentally sound." p. 131. . . . "*Mentally Wendy shows an intelligence age of 10½ years.*" p. 131. (*Italics mine*). . . . "She was shy and timid, with an unreadiness to undertake and a tendency to give up that is characteristic of the typically dull children. There was, too, the typical scantiness of mental resources, and there were no reactions which showed any *strength* of intelligence, but rather the tendency to win with a smile a way around the problems that needed mental grip for the solution. Abstractions were meaningless, and the ordinary grade work of a school would be for this girl a perpetual monotony and waste of time." p. 132. . . . "Those who have long had charge of Wendy say she would never be able to live safely outside. And yet only recently an effort was made to remove her, by someone, it is stated at the institution, who is not herself of over-strong mentality." p. 133.

This girl, too, would likely be at large if Dr. Wallin's standard was applied to her.

"DAVID F., AGE NINETEEN YEARS.—David is one of the

institution's most reliable boys, here since June, 1902." p. 148. . . . "When questioned David readily told me the capitals of California, Texas, Illinois, and the United States, the names of the largest and the smallest ocean, the boundaries of his own state, the name of the largest city in California, in Illinois, and in the United States, etc. He said the Revolution occurred because England would not let the colonies send men to Parliament to help make laws. His answers were given in a uniformly intelligent manner." p. 149-150. . . . "*Examination with the Binet scale gave David a mental age of eleven and a half years.*" p. 150. (*Italics mine*). . . . "We have here a boy who is but very little below the borderline of feeble-mindedness, and who is so happily balanced in his reactions and conduct that his readiness to conduct his own affairs is apt to be over-rated. He proved the latter by a test of his own contriving: Prompted probably by the example of more restless spirits rather than by inherent discontent, he ran away and remained away for some little time. But he was unable to 'make it go' or to know what to do, though abundantly able to earn a living at shoe-repairing or at other work. He was finally returned, has seemed to be more contented, and is doing well. . . . Such a child must be trained to a self-supporting occupation, must be furnished permanent, kindly, directive control, and must in some way be prevented from reproducing his kind. At present, institution life is the solution." p. 151.

What of the arbitrary 10-year standard here?

In these cases of Huey the feeble-mindedness of each subject could not be corroborated by any family heredity. To have proven that the family was feeble-minded would have helped clinch the argument. But Goddard has admirably obviated this difficulty. The reader is referred to his valuable book "Feeble-mindedness; Its Causes and Consequences."⁶ from which the following extracts are taken:

"CASE 2. BYRON T., 19 YEARS OLD, MENTALITY 11." p. 51.

. . . . "Byron T. is 19 years old and tests 11; has been here 13 years; when admitted, was excitable and nervous, cried and laughed without cause, was gluttonous, destroyed clothing and furniture, was dangerous with fire, not truthful, nor trustworthy; active, obstinate, sly and passionate. When put into school here he made very good progress for a defective and learned to read fairly well, to write some, was less lazy, took more interest in

⁶Macmillan, 1914, 599 p. N. Y.

things. He reached his limit, however, in school work, even in basketry; did something in music, but was more especially a farm boy, since he was strong and able to do a good deal of work under direction." p. 52. . . . "He is one of our highest grade boys and is entirely lacking in stigmata of degeneration; indeed, is a handsome lad. . . . A glance at the chart shows what a very bad family this is. The parents were feeble-minded, syphilitic, and sexually immoral. The father, who was also alcoholic, died in an almshouse. This is one of the worst histories, socially and morally, that we have. It is said that the miscarriages and infant deaths in the family were syphilitic cases and were due directly to the contamination. An older brother is sexually immoral and criminalistic. Three others are dead. The father's two sisters and brother are feeble-minded. The mother had a brother and a half-sister who were feeble-minded. The father's mother was feeble-minded and was twice married. By her first husband she had four children, all normal, with the possible exception of one, but her defect was transmitted to her grandchildren, two out of five being feeble-minded. The father of our boy and girl was one of the four children resulting from the second marriage of this woman with a man who was alcoholic and immoral. Our children's mother's parents were both feeble-minded. . . . The paternal grandfather was the child of a woman who was twice married, he being the son of the second marriage, of which nothing else is known. By her first husband, who was considered normal, there were five children, two of whom were feeble-minded. One of these married a supposedly normal woman and two children out of five were feeble-minded. It is evident that the defect here runs back at least into the fifth generation. . . . This is a remarkable family. They have been largely objects of charity, although they inherited some property which they quickly squandered. Neither of the children would be recognized as defective if out in the world, and both would undoubtedly go the way of their ancestors in crime and immorality as well as in the matter of marrying and reproducing defective children." p. 53.

"CASE 6. NANA T., 30 YEARS OLD. MENTALITY 10." p. 71. . . . "She is so high grade and able to present such a good appearance that very few people would be willing to consider her defective. Yet of her defect there is no question. Those who know her in the Institution have learned it by experience and the same thing is shown by psychological examination." p. 72.

. . . . "Without the protection of the Institution, Nana would be the victim of anybody who came along, and would live the same miserable, unhappy life that her mother has lived and also would probably be doing as her mother has done, helping to populate the world with defectives like herself. As will be seen from the chart, Nana has two younger brothers, both defectives; an older sister is married, but cannot be found, hence her mentality is unknown to us." p. 73-74. . . . "The father and mother are clearly feeble-minded; they have separated. The father is counted a very dangerous man. He has made several attempts to regain possession of the girl, but she has no desire to return to a home where there is insufficient food and clothing, and where the father refuses to allow a fire, even in the dead of winter. . . . It will be noted that the girl came to this country when she was 12 years old and was admitted to this Institution about a year later. Here seems to be a case of a father and mother and at least three children all feeble-minded having passed the customs officers and been admitted, perhaps without question. One at least has been a burden upon society for 17 years, the others are probably worse." p. 74.

"CASE 11. MAMIE C., 24 YEARS OLD. MENTALITY 10." p. 85. . . . "Mamie is a splendid illustration of the high grade moron type." p. 85. . . . "She is a quiet, attractive, pleasant girl, very efficient, needs very little supervision, a very valuable helper in the kindergarten, leading the children in many ways and relieving the teacher of much work; besides that she takes all the care of the rooms of the assistant Superintendent and his wife. Can do any kind of housework and does good woodwork; has only a slight defect in speech at present; she is truthful and trustworthy, proud of her good record and has rather a strong ambition to be like the teacher whom she admires." p. 86-87. . . . In the seventeen years that she has been at Vineland, "Mamie has made great improvement; she has had the best of care and training and it cannot be said that she would have made even more if she had not been in an Institution—that she has been institutionalized; on the contrary she has been given great freedom and responsibility, she has had every opportunity and encouragement to improve and there has been developed in her a strong ambition to be like one of her teachers. Her progress has been great and has undoubtedly been about all that she could possibly make, and yet she is mentally defective; not at all able to take her place in the world and compete on equal

terms with others in the struggle for existence. Environment has done much for her, but it has not made her normal and no environment could . . . Her family chart shows the reason." p. 88-89. (Every known member, and there are 24 of them, is feeble-minded. Her parents are feeble-minded. All her grandparents, both on the paternal and the maternal side were feeble-minded. Two of her great-grandparents, the only ones known, were also feeble-minded). . . . "The argument for environment is that it has made her a happy, useful and honest girl. A different environment would have made her the opposite, perhaps a criminal, perhaps a prostitute, undoubtedly a wife, and mother of defectives working hard to maintain a miserable existence struggling against odds that were too great for her. . . . Mamie is a living and brilliant argument for the colonization of all the children of defective ancestors. They need permanent segregation, to the end that that kind of defective human stock may cease to perpetuate itself." p. 89.

How can anyone advise or even suggest the abandonment of "the concept of the high grade moron," and the elimination of "the X—, XI—, and XII— year standards" by means of which feeble-mindedness has been and is now being measured, in the light of these and hundreds of other case histories? Wallin will have to give us much more evidence and far better studies from a scientific viewpoint if he desires to change our present convictions. His strictures can only retard real progress instead of stimulating it.

Before closing I wish to quote a few very apt remarks made by Terman only a short time ago.⁷

"A great deal has been said recently regarding what constitutes psycho-clinical expertness, and as to the kind and amount of training necessary to fit one to make mental examinations of school children.

"The purpose of this note is to raise the question whether, in a field of applied science as new as this one, there may not be danger of the critic assuming an unduly contemptuous attitude toward the efforts which are put forth by the average worker, and whether there is not danger also of evaluating over-critically the work of the scientific explorer after methods and principles of mental examinations. The problems, indeed, are so new and difficult that the most cautious and competent worker must progress slowly and, perhaps, with occasional stumbling.

"No one, of course, will deny that it is legitimate to call

⁷"Concerning Psycho-Clinical Expertness," *Training School Bulletin*, 1914, 11:9.

attention to the dangers of amateur mental testing, of taking too seriously the mental diagnoses made by school nurses, teachers and doctors, and of confusing the complex and baffling-service of clinical psychology with the mechanical use of the Binet intelligence tests. At the same time it is well to remember that the methods of clinical psychology, even at their best, are still in an embryonic stage of development, and that no one, however sagacious or well-trained in psychological technique, can rightfully lay claim to any great degree of psycho-clinical expertness.

"The writer would especially protest against the publication of contentious articles by workers in this field whose purpose appears to be that of disparaging the results of others. Some of the articles of this nature which have found their way into print are colored in every aspect by bombast, pretentiousness and shockingly open claims to recognition. Some of them hardly less than bawling self-advertisements in which word-coining and word-juggling take the place of scientific content.

"Let all of us who are really concerned about the progress of this new and fascinating division of applied psychology be content to work by the best methods now available, correcting and amplifying these as rapidly as possible by positive contribution of fact, and let us cease wasting energy hysterically over the 'dangerous' and 'pernicious' methods of 'incompetent' psycho-clinicians."

In conclusion, taking Wallin's results and interpreting them accurately, they stand not at all as an indictment of the Binet scale, but rather as excellent evidence demonstrating its value and general accuracy as a measuring instrument.